

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT #OR-035-03-01

The attached Environmental Assessment (EA) contains a description of the proposed Project, an analysis of expected impacts on land and resources, and mitigating measures to reduce those impacts.

In terms of context, I find that the impacts described would occur only along the route of the proposed Project and to viewpoints near the route but not in the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. Societal and regional impacts would relate to improved reliability of electrical power supplied to the applicant's service territory, which includes the Treasure Valley. There would be no adverse impact on potentially affected interests.

In terms of intensity, I have evaluated the effects of the proposed Project, together with the proposed Project mitigating measures, against the test of significance found at 40 CFR 1508.27. I find that:

1. The proposed Project would cause no significant impacts, either beneficial or adverse. All impacts would be moderate to low; most would be of short duration.
2. The proposed Project would have a beneficial effect to public health and safety, due to the improved reliability of electric power provided to residents within the applicant's service territory.
3. The proposed Project would not adversely affect unique characteristics of the geographic area.
4. The proposed Project would have no highly controversial effects. The EA examines five issues that have the potential to generate controversy. The proposed mitigation is expected to render any controversy not significant. Those issues are:
 - a. The proposed transmission line would impact visual resources from construction activities and long-term operation of the proposed Project. The visibility of transmission structures and associated access roads from key observation points (residences, recreation areas, and Oxbow-Brownlee Road) would be the main source of visual impacts. Corten steel poles and non-specular conductors would be used to reduce visual contrast. IPC worked closely with BLM during the preliminary design phase to determine a route that would minimize impacts potentially caused by new access roads and other Project facilities contrasting with the existing landscape. Established Visual Resource Management objectives would not be fully met in all locations. However, due to other resource considerations, I have determined mitigation measures have reduced the visual contrast to acceptable levels. The impacts are therefore not significant.
 - b. The proposed Project's location is near an active bald eagle nest, but the proposed route avoids the nest site by 400 meters. The area is also an important eagle winter roost area. Seasonal restrictions on construction would be applied to minimize the effects on eagles. Additionally, the conductor spacing would be

sufficient so that the project would not pose an electrocution hazard to raptor species.

- c. Temporary soil surface disturbance would likely result from proposed Project construction causing some increased wind and water erosion rates and compaction levels. The potential for large-scale erosion may be increased in areas because of severe slopes and highly erodible soil types. In areas where potential impacts to water resources and wetlands are possible, mitigation measures committed to by IPC would be expected to be effective in reducing or eliminating those potential impacts.
 - d. The proposed Project area is known habitat for bighorn sheep and wintering mule deer. Bighorn sheep use the area for lambing in the spring. Disturbance from construction activities and increased access from new roads could potentially impact bighorn sheep and mule deer; however construction timing would allow for avoidance of impacts during lambing.
 - e. Two developed recreation areas are located adjacent to the proposed Project area and much of the area is used for dispersed recreation (e.g., hunting, fishing, camping, wildlife viewing). The Project would not directly impact the developed recreation areas or change the availability of areas used for dispersed recreation. The Sheep Mountain Wilderness Study Area and Sheep Mountain Area of Critical Environmental Concern are adjacent to the proposed Project, and may be indirectly impacted by increased non-motorized access with the construction of new access roads. IPC would work with BLM to block access and revegetate these new access roads as needed to minimize this impact.
- 5. The proposed Project would have no uncertain effects and would not involve unique or unknown risks.
 - 6. The proposed Project is a typical project located within a designated utility corridor and does not establish a precedent for future actions.
 - 7. The proposed Project is not related to any other action being considered by BLM.
 - 8. The proposed Project would have no effect to any property listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
 - 9. The proposed Project would not adversely affect an endangered or threatened species, or any habitat critical to an endangered or threatened species.
 - 10. The proposed project does not violate any law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

Therefore, I have determined that the proposed action, with the proposed mitigating measures, would not have any significant impacts on the human or natural environment, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Field Manager

Date